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SHE LET GO OF MY HAND

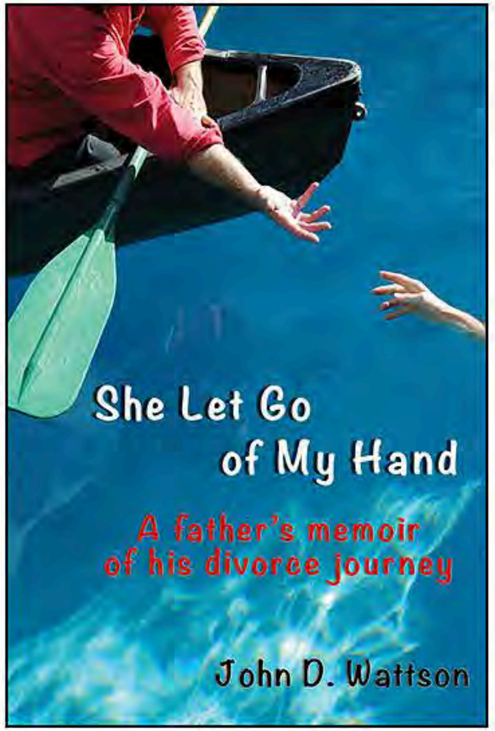
A father's memoir of his divorce journey

A heart-wrenching story that resonates with everyone who has ever experienced a loving partnership.

"It has been painful to realize that John is a CAT
who tried to be a DOG all these years,
but in the end, he is a cat and will always be.
I do not want him to be anything more than who he is.
He has tried to be a dog because a dog is what I want,
but alas, he can only be who he is."
~ Veeby QUOTE ~

Queen Veeby proclaims her husband, John...is a CAT.

Her Highness really prefers a DOG. Adorned with shaming pendants, John's collar merely reflects projections from her royal crown. They dance the stately Silent Treatment Tango until her screams of discontent drown out the music. Thus, she abruptly ends their dance and commences the Game of Divorce.



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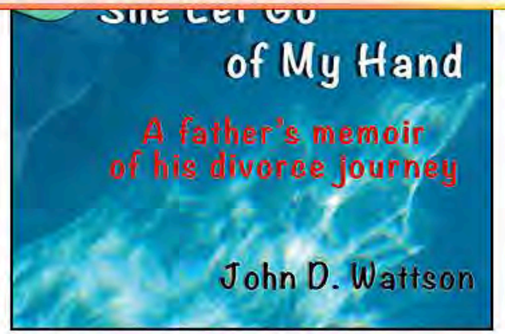

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CALM

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THE DANCE

You must always remember that
I never wanted our song to end.

I've led some, but mostly followed...
It was safer for me.
I have stepped on your toes...
Mine have been walked on as well...;-(

I always loved it when you were in my arms.
Hearing you hum...brought me comfort.

Our dance has been a blessing...
Just look at those three beautiful spin-offs!
We will always be former dance partners.

We've ended up on different sides of the room—
You are in the corner of fear and anger...
I'm over near the place of love and appreciation.

Never meant to hurt you...I am sorry

I'll cry with you...since no words can express our loss

However...for now
The music has stopped...
The dance is over.

I have to let you go

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123

YOUR LOVE WILL REFLECT IN THEIR LIVES FOREVER

To My Children:

Mom wrote those words to me many years ago and I believe they have proven true. Both mom and I have loved you kids dearly and we already see that love reflected in your lives. You all were very loved growing up. We had many good times, fun times...with laughing and playfulness. That's very important to remember. You kids have been shaped well by our love.

To be clear, there was never some "Master Plan" that mom and dad would meet, fall in love, have you three children and then get divorced...just to mess up your lives. Generally, that's not how life unfolds. Unfortunately, at this time in our society it's simply more acceptable for people to bail on their marriage relationships when things get difficult. It really is hard to stick together "in sickness and in health." You each have friends whose parents are divorced—it's just a thing that is more common these days. You kids have simply experienced that part of life through your parents. I'm sure it probably wasn't fun to live through—seeing your parents disagree and legally fight—hey, it wasn't fun for us either!

I threw you all a life preserver before the major waves of divorce crashed over our family. I told you to simply FLOAT through the process...to love on mom, love on dad and to not choose sides while you let the waters simply wash over you. I'm sure you held your breath at times...me, too...waiting for the turbulent waves to return to calmer waters. For the most part, you all have survived. You might even be a little stronger in your upper body muscles from having swum through some crazy times, but...you've survived. The waters are calmer now...you can relax. You are all right. Wherever you are right now, your mom and dad are holding you and giving you a long hug.

You three are NOT damaged goods. Your past does not dictate your future, unless you let it do so. You would be wise to take the opportunity to process your thoughts and feelings with a therapist. Get a different perspective and acquire some helpful emotional tools to better understand and deal with your childhood remembrances of mom and dad's divorce. If you don't do this, you probably will carry around a lot of emotional baggage for quite awhile...and mom and I don't want that for you. Explore the concept that forgiveness opens a doorway to peace. Then, walk through that doorway and continue your own journey...knowing you have our love and blessings.

Your mother and I had a very long run of growing up together. We did LIFE and LOVE together, as partners. We lived life similarly to how you will...one experience at a time. And in so doing, we created history together—OUR history and shared life events. Our schooling, our home purchases, our having each of you, our times of crazy...the all of it. There is no absolute right or wrong version of our story—WE were and therefore YOU are. Mom and I often spoke of how blessed we were to have you three "Golden Gumballs" ...those gumballs are unique in color and more rarely dispensed in the rolling vending machines.

Kids, I've found that the struggles we go through in this lifetime help to make us who we are. The physical and emotional scars we wear are merely testaments to the battles we've gone through...and survived—indeed, proof that we are still alive. By learning to live with your whole heart...and accepting the risks that go along with the rewards...you will come to know your own worthiness. I've lived, am scarred and I know my worthiness. This knowledge has allowed me to endure all types of accusations when I knew they weren't true...to endure many kinds of verbal assaults from those closest to me and from those who didn't know me at all. Each of you were purposefully brought into the world by two people who loved each other

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Each of you are gentle, loving and tender-hearted. Your hearts will become further educated in compassion through your relationships with others. I hope you remain open to experiencing love and marriage. I wish for each of you to love deeply and passionately. It's wonderful…yet, scary…but there's no other way to know that part of life. You will most definitely experience hurts and losses within various relationships…again, that's how life works. Embrace the hurts, accept the scars and then move on.

There will be times in the future when you become aware of softly humming to yourself…in the mindless moments alone in your room, a shower or the car. Your mom used to do that, too…and your dad found comfort in those sweet expressions of her inner happiness. Let those moments be a remembrance that you carry our love in your heart…and you will always be all right…no matter what.

I love you Eliana…

I love you Noelle…

I love you Mark…

Dad

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If someone will not welcome you or listen to your words,
shake the dust off your "dancing shoes" when you leave.

Matthew 10:14

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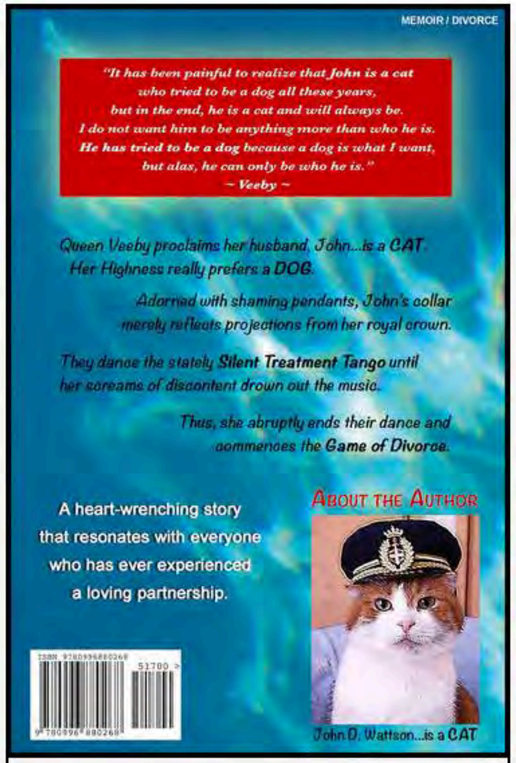

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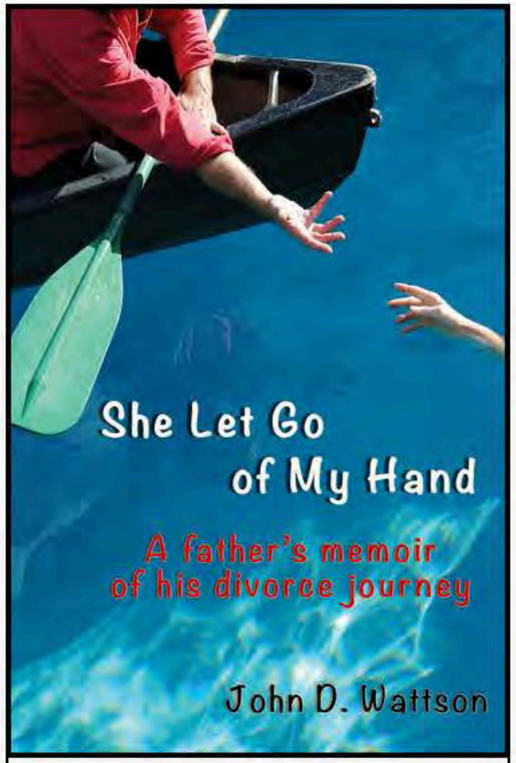

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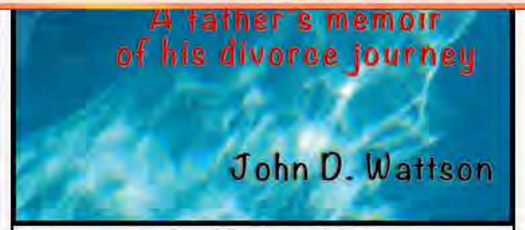

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DISCLAIMER: This is my story and I've told it as I remember it and to the best of my ability. My intent is to share the story that I know to be true...for me. I stand behind the truth of the events and memories. The names of the characters have been changed to protect the innocent parties. Even the names of the guilty have been changed...as a courtesy. Any similarities to actual persons, either living or dead, are merely coincidental.

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ISBN 978-0-9968802-6-8

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CALM

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Too many times, we've experienced rough seas
17 foot waves often try to veer us off course...
The wake of other ships seems intent on tossing us out of our little boat.
The journey thus far has been to just try and hold on

It's easy to see interesting things on either side of the boat
One or the other of us will lean over the edge to get a closer look
This has only made the boat lopsided...
Nearly capsizing us...way too often

Sometimes, we see the huge waves coming at us
We try to run from one side to the other...to balance ourselves
Even after the waves have subsided, we continue running back and forth...
It's what we've gotten use to doing to steady our boat

This does nothing but continue to create waves
WE create the waves by running back and forth
In a vain attempt to stabilize the boat

If, however, we remain calm...
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PROLOGUE

The "Calm" in a relationship does not return when one passenger disembarks. Instead, a different "calm" eventually emerges—typically called the "aftermath." My wife and partner of 33+ years—I'll call her Veeby—gave up on our coupleship, got out of our boat and then proclaimed she had...
"...washed up on a beach of love."
However, I believe she never made it to the shore.

When Veeby got out of our boat and "let go of my hand," she began to sink very fast into the watery depths of despair, fear, and eventually anger... which seems to remain her final resting place. She managed to tread water long enough to hurl floating debris [as bombs] back towards the boat, however. This created even more waves, purposefully trying to tip me out of the boat, all the while creating a wider gulf between us.

I find myself agreeing with the character Gimli...
from the Lord of the Rings Trilogy—who said:
"Faithless is [she] that says farewell when the sea [road] darkens."

As you will read in the following pages, Veeby and I acknowledged our journey together would be long and difficult, but also joyful. Veeby chose to "get out" during troubled seas and has seemingly forgotten all the fun and wonderful times we had on board. Of course, we had many "less than wonderful times" as well, but I believe that would be a typical description of most marriage relationships.

Since I consider myself a Reductionist, here's how we got to this place:
- I hurt her,
- she hurt me,
- we decided to divorce...

...and then all hell broke loose.

Of course, there's a lot more to the story, but that's the short version.

Indeed, there are two sides to every coin, or story...and this is mine. I don't normally write out my thoughts and feelings—it proved far too risky within the relationship to expose what I was really thinking and feeling. I always believed that if my diary or journal were ever found, the information would be used against me.

Now, I write mostly for me...as a cathartic experience...but also to highlight the injustice that screams throughout the story.

I write for our children—when they are ready to read the story—for further understanding about this turbulent time in their lives.

I write for our friends and family who may have witnessed some of these events...but only saw one side of the coin at the time.

I write for the roughly 60% of people that have experienced divorce trauma themselves...who may recognize some of the pain and injustice...who have learned from their experiences, survived and are hopefully now thriving.

I also write to educate and gift empathy and gracious understanding to the remaining 40% of folks who have not gone through the trauma of divorce.

I am trusting that Iyanla Vanzant's wise words will come true:
"When you stand and share your story in an empowering way,

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I am trusting that Iyanla Vanzant's wise words will come true:
"When you stand and share your story in an empowering way,
your story will heal you and your story will heal somebody else."

So, without further interruptions...other than Veeby's voice in my head...I will tell you MY truth and experience in the divorce journey. Since I journaled during that time period, I trust these memories to be accurate. Additionally, I will reference many of the court documents and transcripts...plus many handwritten letters, cards, emails and texts.

John

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A LITTLE BACKGROUND

In the beginning, we were young and happy. Veeby and I met in high school, I "chased her until she caught me" as we liked to say, and then we grew up in life together. We married young and at our wedding, we purposefully did not use the "traditional vows"...instead, we each said the following:

Before our friends, family and God,
I stand here today committing my life to you.
I choose you as my companion and friend through life.
To share with and love with; to accept and respect.
I commit my time and understanding; my loyalty and love.
I promise to continue dreaming and working with you;
to make our lives worth having lived.
I choose to share my life with you.

We publicly acknowledged we were on a journey together...by reading this during the ceremony:

The way is long...Let us go together
The way is difficult...Let us help each other
The way is joyful...Let us share it
The way is ours alone...Let us go in love
The way opens before us...Let us begin.

15 years later, we used the same vows and reading at our Renewal of Vows Ceremony.

We were very much in love and looking forward to our journey together.
Veeby was happy.
Within her early cards to me, she wrote:

1st Anniversary—My Dearest John, One year ago, we started on an adventure, and tomorrow—one year later—we'll do the same! Let's make it worth remembering! I love you—more than ever!

3rd Anniversary—My Dearest John, The last three years of my life have been "transforming." That's because when I met you, you loved me enough to allow me to change. You've allowed and helped me change, John. You taught me what it is to feel love and most importantly to give love. I've learned to love through you. For that I am forever in your debt. Let's make the next three years as "transforming" as the last three! I love you!

My Birthday—My Dearest John, My wish for your birthday is that you acknowledge the wonderful person that you are. You should let that wonderful person be known by others than just me! Thank you for sharing your life with me.

4th Anniversary—My Dearest John, Thank you for coming and staying in my life. You give my life the stability I've always needed—you are my rock! Thanks for loving me and letting me love you. Happy 4th Anniversary! With all my love,

5th Anniversary—I love you very much, John. I want our lives together to be filled with joy...for the way has been joyful—so let us share! Happy 5th! Much love...

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I want to be able to undue [sic] all the hurt and cruel words I've caused and used—but apologies don't seem to suffice. I want to be able to promise that I'll never act or say such things again, but I know that I can't promise that because I'd fail and I don't want unbroken promises to be between us.

I know that the biggest weapon I have to use against you is the threat of leaving you. I never want that to come about, but sometimes I fear that I'll go through with it just to prove my point. I don't want to be like my father—backed into a corner by his pride and going through with actions that only hurt all who are involved.

You are a very wonderful human being, John—you are because I would have never married you if you weren't. I know that I'm immature in many respects but about this I'm not—you care enough to love me and stick with me and that takes a lot of caring and goodness. I'm not an easy person to live with—I wish I could change—maybe I can but it would require your help. You've helped me already—so much! You've taught me to open up and be willing to love!

Believe me when I say that I never want to hurt you—I hate myself when I'm hurting you—it's just a vicious cycle that I don't know how to stop.

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I want to be good for you, John, but I really don't know how. I say you're selfish—and part of me believes that—but part of me knows that I'm accusing me, not you. I'm very selfish. I love you, John.

And...
John—I'm tired of saying I'm sorry—but I guess I am. Don't cut me off—I need you to stay in there with me and let me be angry—it won't get overwhelming and out of control—as long as I know you care and understand—I just want it to be the two of us, not just me.

And...
You have become an ugly man, John, both in body and soul. Lately, I wonder why I stick around. I will chose another person to be emotionally close to. I have always given you that part of me—but I won't trust it to you anymore. Sometimes it amazes me that knowing that I'm vulnerable you continue to hurt me. You should be ashamed of your ugliness John, I am.

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And…
My anger flows—often at John—he'll tap into it and out it comes—when it needs to have been directed at my father for his distance, at my mother for her complicity and need to protect my dad from my anger—her own anger. John and I entered into an unconscious dance—complicit in each others anger issues. But my passion for John got buried under fear—fear that I need him too much, depend on him too much—that he wouldn't reciprocate. That I don't love him as much as he loves me so that I won't feel too vulnerable—find out he doesn't love me. I resented [his work]—it caused me to pull away—to close my heart to him—to be cruel to him—cut him off, to be repelled and not want to be loving—tender—caressing—all the things he wanted—I didn't want to feel them—because it left me scared that if I gave him that—he would just take and retreat to his world—his work—with my gift without me getting anything back—I would be left emptied, so I hoarded my love—which drove him further away. What a vicious cycle.

Again, you get the idea.

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In contrast to her verbosity, I never really felt safe enough to write out my feelings on paper. The few times I tried to keep a journal, it was "found" and was "discussed" between us. I clearly remember destroying my fledgling journal after that. So, I was surprised when many years later I discovered two pages from my handwritten journal entry I'd written in 1982…two years into our marriage…that I'd stuffed between the pages of a book and had miraculously survived:

For the first time, I really feel like being away from Veeby. She makes me so mad; she's rude to me; she's always fighting; not a nice home life. Today, we've not talked all day long and have been avoiding each other as much as possible. I want to tell her to stay when she goes [to visit her family]. I really feel like divorcing. She says such mean things to me, I retreat more and more.

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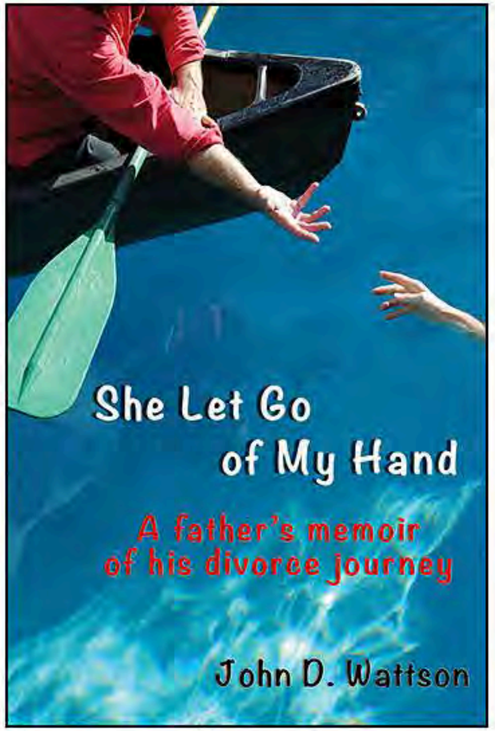
SHE LET GO OF MY HAND

A father's memoir of his divorce journey

A heart-wrenching story that resonates with everyone who has ever experienced a loving partnership.

"It has been painful to realize that John is a CAT
who tried to be a DOG all these years,
but in the end, he is a cat and will always be.
I do not want him to be anything more than who he is.
He has tried to be a dog because a dog is what I want,
but alas, he can only be who he is."
~ Veeby QUOTE ~



Queen Veeby proclaims her husband, John...is a CAT.

Her Highness really prefers a DOG. Adorned with shaming pendants, John's collar merely reflects projections from her royal crown. They dance the stately Silent Treatment Tango until her screams of discontent drown out the music. Thus, she abruptly ends their dance and commences the Game of Divorce.